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Michael F. Easley
Governor

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William G. Ross Jr.
Secretary, DENR

GRANDFATHER TO BE STATE PARK

AGREEMENT SET TO ACQUIRE 2,601 ACRES

Grandfather Mountain, one of North Carolina's most beloved natural landmarks, will join the pantheon of state parks under an agreement announced in September.

The state will purchase the mountain's 2,601-acre crest, laced with trails and known as the "backcountry," as well as a conservation easement on 604 acres that contains the tourist destination created by the late Hugh Morton with its nature center, wildlife habitats and signature "mile-high" swinging bridge.

The purchase price is \$12 million. In October, both the Parks and Recreation and Natural Heritage trust funds committed to financing the acquisition at \$6 million each.

The state parks system



CRAE MORTON, RIGHT, AND GOV. MIKE EASLEY SIGN AGREEMENT FOR THE STATE TO ACQUIRE GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN. LOOKING ON, FROM LEFT, ARE DENR SECRETARY BILL ROSS, MIKE LEONARD OF THE CONSERVATION FUND, MARY EASLEY AND LEWIS LEDFORD, STATE PARKS DIRECTOR. (PHOTO BY HELEN HOPPER)

will ask the 2009 General Assembly to formally authorize the system's 34th state park at Grandfather Mountain.

"Today, Grandfather Mountain and all its scenic beauty becomes a state park,

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PARKS RESERVATIONS PLAN UNFOLDS

The state parks system is developing a full-service, Internet- and call center-based reservations system that will be ready for park visitors early in 2009.

Such a reservations system has been the most

requested amenity in recent years by park visitors, who are increasingly Internet savvy when it comes to planning their weekends and vacations.

The system will track reservations for nearly 3,000 campsites (in 15 categories),

106 picnic shelters, and nine community buildings as well as a collection of conference rooms and auditoriums in the parks system's visitor centers.

"We're confident this will be a state-of-the-art system

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Department of Environment and Natural Resources

From The Director's Desk

It's great to take a few moments to enjoy a success such as the pending acquisition of Grandfather Mountain for the state parks system. But, when all the factors that are involved in such an event are considered, one tends to take a breath of relief that it all came together smoothly and relatively quickly.

The effort had some powerful factors going for it. One was the state parks' long-term working relationship with the state's conservation community. In this case, it was The Conservation Fund through Mike Leonard (who was also directly involved in the acquisition of Chimney Rock in 2007). Mike recognized that Grandfather Mountain and the state parks system needed to talk when he learned of Crae Morton's desire to forever preserve the landmark.

Also necessary was a faith in the state parks system by the Morton family – and North Carolinians everywhere – as a proper steward for this mountain. The strong tradition of natural resource protection in the state parks likely contributed to this confidence. In the same vein, there had to be confidence that state government could and would finance the deal through its conservation trust funds with support of the General Assembly and Gov. Mike Easley. Here's another example where the very existence of the trust funds creates opportunities.

Another ingredient was the conservation ethic of Crae and Catherine Morton, and the entire Morton family, not unlike that of the Morse family at Chimney Rock. The late Hugh Morton and his family have worked for years with The Nature Conservancy to fashion long-term protection of the mountain. That sense of responsibility to the land and to the future is also shared by quite a few other landowners with whom we deal every day. They realize more often that conservation is an alternative when dealing with family land.

There were plenty of other factors, including a dose of luck and good timing. There is much work yet to be done to create a state park at Grandfather Mountain. But if we continue to be guided by these same principles, we can't go too far wrong.

A less welcome task for the immediate future is to deal with a sudden and dramatic budget shortfall. A recent newspaper report estimates the potential shortfall at \$2 billion this year. That's about 10 percent of the entire state budget and would eclipse the hard times of 2001, the most recent round of budget reductions.

Our department has been advised to immediately go beyond Gov. Easley's target of 3 percent in trimming current expenses, and we are targeting 5 percent in the hopes that it will help prevent more painful spending cuts later. The division's chief of operations, Greg Schneider, recently laid out some thoughtful and thorough guidelines for every one of the state parks to keep operations expenses down.

It's hard to overstate the seriousness of this situation. We can pull through this while maintaining the mission of the state parks, but it'll take everybody's efforts.

Sincerely,



Lewis Ledford

UP CLOSE & 'PERSONNEL'

Gene Peacock is the new interpretive and education specialist for the south district. He is a graduate of UNC at Greensboro with a bachelor's degree in anthropology and has a master's degree in liberal arts from Oklahoma City University. He was a program coordinator for the Wildlife Resources Commission and a teacher in Duplin County.

Rothie Hurdle is a new maintenance mechanic at Jockey's Ridge State Park. A graduate of Northeastern High School in Elizabeth City, he has worked for the Dare County Parks and Recreation Department and has been self-employed.

Eric Gaither joined the staff at Falls Lake State Recreation Area as a park ranger. He is a graduate of Enloe High School in Raleigh and UNC at Wilmington with a bachelor's degree in environmental studies. He was a seasonal employee at Carolina Beach State Park and most recently was a park ranger for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation in Napa, Calif.

Pamela Pearson is a new office assistant at Hammocks Beach State Park. She attended City University of New York and has more than 18 years related experience, most recently with Wachovia Securities, LLC.

Leslie Edwards-Smith is a new ranger at Hammocks Beach State Park. She is a graduate of East Tennessee State University with a bachelor's degree in parks and recreation management and was a seasonal employee

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WACCAMAW ADDS BOAT ACCESS PROPERTY

The staff of Lake Waccamaw State Park recently began management of a 3.4-acre boat access area near the park on the lake's southeast shore after the state purchased the land from a private development group.

The change maintains a second public boating access on the lake, one that's especially popular for owners of small boats, canoes and kayaks, many of whom are headed for the quiet, shallow waters of Big Creek and Friar Swamp.

Dating back to 1993, the ramp was managed by Columbus County Parks and Recreation under a lease agreement with Federal Paper Board and more recently, International Paper Corp. The county refurbished the ramp eight years ago.

In 2007, when the "federal clubhouse" property and the adjoining boat ramp, parking area and lagoon were sold to Andeim Service Co. Inc., there was concern in the community that the access would be closed.

Officials with the Town of Lake Waccamaw and the state parks system began to explore ways to acquire the property to keep it in the public trust.

Earlier this year, the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Authority allocated \$372,000 for the acquisition. This was combined with \$88,000 received from DOT for state park property used in a nearby bridge replacement project.

PERSONNEL

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area. She has also worked at Grandfather Mountain and Assateague Island Seashore in Virginia.

Luis Carrasco is a new mapping technology specialist with the division's planning department. A native of Peru, he is a graduate of North Carolina State University with a master's degree in environmental management. He previously worked for the university's forestry department and the state's Ecosystem Enhancement Program.

Darrin Oliver joined the staff of Lake James State Park as a maintenance me-

chanic. A graduate of Freedom High School in Morganton and Western Piedmont Community College, he has more than 10 years related experience, most recently with Burke County Public Schools.

Joel Jakubowski is a new ranger at Cliffs of the Neuse State Park. He earned an associate's degree in natural resource technology from Lake Superior State University and has worked as a zoo security officer and a park officer in Michigan.

Sam Jordan has been promoted to Maintenance Mechanic II at William B. Umstead State Park. A graduate of Vance

Granville Community College and a first responder, Jordan has worked at the park for four years.

Jennifer Clifton is the new office assistant at Jones Lake State Park. She is a graduate of Cape Fear High School in Fayetteville and Sampson Community College in Clinton and was formerly a deputy clerk of court in Cumberland County.

Carlton Griffin joined the staff of Dismal Swamp State Park as a maintenance mechanic. He is a graduate of College of the Albemarle in Elizabeth City, served in the U.S. Army and has more than four years of related experience.

'PARK' IT

WITH A STATE PARKS
SPECIALTY LICENSE TAG



The Division of Parks and Recreation has taken orders for the first 300 of these special license plates and those will be delivered soon. There is a \$30 fee in addition to regular license fees (\$60 for personalized plates). Additional fees support conservation through the Parks and Recreation and Natural Heritage trust funds.

Applications online at www.ncparks.gov
or write: Adrienne McCoig, N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation
1615 MSC, Raleigh, NC 27699-1615

PARKS LURE CHILDREN TO OUTDOORS

An owl prowl, a bug safari, an astronomy night, surf fishing and a search for Black-beard's treasure were among more than 70 special programs at North Carolina's state parks during Take a Child Outside Week in late September.

Each state park committed to offering at least two special interpretive programs during the week, and many were offered by park rangers in late afternoons and at sunset so that adults could spend quality time with children throughout the week.

And, parks made available exciting Get Outside! kits to families and small groups to prompt do-it-yourself activities to rediscover nature's wonders.

Take a Child Outside Week originated in 2007 with environmental educators at the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences and was sparked by the book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* by Richard Louv. The book suggests that opportunities for children to explore forests, fields and wetlands are disappearing in favor of afternoons spent play-



A WATER QUALITY PROGRAM AT LAKE LYNN WAS A PARTNERSHIP EFFORT BETWEEN STATE PARKS, RALEIGH AND THE DIVISION OF WATER QUALITY.

ing indoors with video games.

Research has shown that engaging children in nature promotes learning, creativity and healthy lifestyles. Children who learn to play in natural settings are often more physically fit, score higher on tests of concentration and often can simply enjoy life more fully.

"State parks regularly offer free and compelling interpretive programs for families, especially on weekends," said Lewis Ledford, state parks

director. "During this week, the parks made special efforts to entice youngsters, their parents and adult friends to learn and have fun in nature."

Take a Child Outside Week has been embraced by several other states through their environmental education and state parks programs. North Carolina's state parks system is also involved in the national Children in Nature initiative developed especially for state parks and promoted by the National Association of State Park Directors.

"I want to thank park staff for contributing well beyond what was expected," said Sean Higgins, the system's coordinator of interpretive programs. "In some ways it seems like every week is Take a Child Outside Week in state parks."

Volunteers also helped with many of the special programs. At Falls Lake State Recreation Area, the Piedmont Panfishers took children on fishing trips.



LEARNING ABOUT ANIMAL TRACKS AT HANGING ROCK STATE PARK.

NEW FACILITIES OPEN AT ELK KNOB

The annual Elk Knob Headwaters Community Day in September was a perfect opportunity for Elk Knob State Park in Watauga County to show off its new interim visitor facilities.

Dozens of visitors, many of them from the local community and Appalachian State University in Boone, examined a new ranger contact station, parking areas, picnic grounds and a large section of new trail to the mountain's 5,520-foot summit.

"We're very proud of these new facilities that will help visitors enjoy this developing state park and the community should share that pride," Park Superintendent Larry Trivette said. "The park staff has had tremendous help from volunteers, and the community day was a chance for all of us to celebrate the achievement."

Elk Knob maintenance mechanic Ray Black and rangers Kelly Safley and Andy Sicard did much of the pre-construction preparation and landscaping and built the picnic grounds, while volunteers, some of them ASU students, have logged nearly 1,500 hours in the ongoing summit trail project.

Trivette said that Jody Reavis, the west district facilities maintenance chief, did a yeoman's job of coordinating the staff efforts. Maintenance staff from New River State Park and Mount Jefferson State Natural Area



TOP, RANGER NORA MCGRATH HOLDS AN INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM ON WILDLIFE AND LITTERING. ABOVE, HIKERS MAKE THE SUMMIT.

lent a hand with plumbing and landscaping.

To dress up the entrance, the staff erected a 35-foot flagpole and is adding a decorative rock wall.

Funding for the interim facilities came from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

A state natural area was established at Elk Knob in 2003 with an initial land acquisition through The Nature Conservancy. In 2007, the unit was re-authorized as a state park and now encom-

passes 2,891 acres including land on the adjoining Snake Mountain and on The Peak in neighboring Ashe County.

The community day event is sponsored by the Elk Knob Community Heritage Organization and has become a fall tradition in the new park. It featured a covered dish lunch, entertainment and an opportunity to share and collect oral histories from area residents through the university's Goodnight Family Sustainable Development Program.

GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

which is one more step in our efforts to be One North Carolina Naturally,” said Governor Mike Easley as he announced the deal Sept. 29 in a ceremony at the mountain’s MacCrae Meadows.

“This is an extremely important habitat and we will take good care of it. The dreams of many North Carolinians and Hugh Morton will be met: North Carolina will protect and preserve Grandfather Mountain forever.”

The heirs of Hugh Morton, who fashioned the travel destination from family land and created Grandfather Mountain Inc., will continue to operate the attraction through a nonprofit organization.

“Grandfather Mountain is going to be able to fulfill a mission in ways we haven’t tried to imagine yet,” Crae Morton, president of Grandfather Mountain Inc, told the *Charlotte Observer*. “It’s just a win-win-win-win for the mountain, the people of North Carolina, for the Mortons, for the visitors to the mountain.”

The acquisition was arranged over the summer with the help of The Conservation Fund and one of its directors, Mike Leonard, and The Nature Conservancy, which holds conservation easements on the mountain and surrounding properties totaling close to 4,000 acres.

Leonard approached Crae Morton last year about placing the tourist attraction under a protective easement and Morton suggested the family might be willing to sell the backcountry area as well. At that point, Leonard brought



GOV. MIKE EASLEY AND HIS WIFE MARY REMINISCED A FEW MOMENTS ABOUT CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES EXPLORING GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN.

Lewis Ledford, director of the state parks system, into the negotiations.

“The acquisition of Grandfather Mountain builds on our success at Chimney Rock, which was added to the state parks system last year, and shows again that great things can be accomplished through partnerships and a trust in the conservation spirit of the state’s citizens,” Ledford said.

The N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation will manage the undeveloped portion of Grandfather Mountain, including its 12 miles of trails, as a state park and will consider seeking additional acreage for traditional park facilities.

Any additional tracts or facilities would be identified and prescribed through a public master planning process.

The new Chimney Rock State Park in Rutherford County is undergoing just such a master planning process following the acquisition of the 996-acre Chimney Rock Park

from the Morse family. That state park has grown to more than 4,000 acres in the Hickory Nut Gorge.

Bill Ross, secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources called the Grandfather Mountain acquisition “an amazing and wonderful conservation story.”

“Maybe, like me, you’ve come to treasure the mountain’s remarkable backcountry trails,” Ross said. “Maybe, on a business or vacation trip, you have driven along the Linn Cove Viaduct on the Blue Ridge Parkway, gazed up at Grandfather Mountain, and, as the poet Robinson Jeffers said of another mountain, ‘felt its intense reality with love and wonder.’”

The easement on the 604-acre portion limits development on this property, yet will allow popular events such as the Highland Games and the Singing on the Mountain to continue.

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GRANDFATHER

...AS OLD AS THE HILLS



MICHAUX BELIEVED IT TO BE THE HIGHEST ON THE CONTINENT IN 1794.

It's estimated at 730 million years old, harbors 73 rare species, is 5,946 feet high and has been luring people to its lofty crags for centuries.

French botanist Andre Michaux climbed it in 1794, believing it to be the highest peak in all of North America. Harvard botanist Asa Gray came in 1841 and discovered the lily that bears his name.

Famed conservationist John Muir came in 1898 and, according to the American Museum Journal, began to leap about and sing in response to the scenic views.

Still, more than 250,000 people each year visit the mountain and the attraction built by the late Hugh Morton. It's a right of passage for North

Carolinians. They're still taken care of by Morton's heirs along with 38 fulltime and 55 seasonal employees.

Morton came to own the mountain through family connections. Samuel T. Kelsey bought most of the tracts that encompass Grandfather Mountain from William W. Lenoir, grandson of General William Lenoir. Kelsey enlisted Donald MacRae of Wilmington to help develop a town in the Linville River Valley in 1885.

The MacRae family eventually acquired controlling interest in the project and Donald's son Hugh was elected to head the Linville Improvement Company.

Initial development on the mountain in the early 1900s

included improving a horse-back trail to a one-lane road. A wooden platform was built and a nominal toll was charged to those who wished to drive up and see the view.

Hugh MacRae Morton became the mountain's sole owner in 1952. He widened the road to two lanes and extended it to the summit so people could reach his new Mile High Swing-ing Bridge.

In 1990, Grandfather Mountain Inc. began working with The Nature Conservancy to protect acreage in the mountain's backcountry. This included several easements sold at roughly half the fair-market value along the mountain's crest and encompassing the headwaters of both the Linville and Watauga rivers and the popular Profile Trail.

The mountain has 12 miles of maintained trails, ranging from easy walks near the attraction to strenuous climbs.

Grandfather Mountain became an International Biosphere Reserve in 1992, participating in a United Nations program to help land managers share scientific knowledge and practical experience.



THE MOUNTAIN'S PROFILE TRAIL OFFERS SOME CHALLENGING TERRAIN.

GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

The agreement also gives the state the right of first refusal should the Morton family decide to sell that tract.

Crae Morton said that placing the attraction under a nonprofit entity will bring tax advantages for the family and allow it to seek grants and donations to expand educational and research programs. Morton will serve as executive director of the nonprofit.

Grandfather Mountain lies in Avery, Watauga and Caldwell counties. With its 5,946-foot Calloway peak, diversity of habitats and rare species, it is an important addition to the state's conservation lands.

The mountain supports 16 distinct natural communities. The most notable is the red spruce-Fraser fir forest, and the list also includes a heath bald, high-elevation red oak forest, rich cove forest, Canada hemlock forest and spray cliff.

A total 73 rare species have been identified on the mountain. Of these, 32 are federally or state listed as imperiled. Species include the spruce fir moss spider, Blue Ridge goldenrod, bog turtle and the Carolina northern flying squirrel.

The mountain contains the headwaters of both the Linville and Watuga rivers and has been the only private park designated as an International

Biosphere Reserve.

The mountain is also an important component of a much larger network of conservation lands. Adjacent and nearby properties include the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Pisgah National Forest and holdings by The Nature Conservancy.

The state parks system also has other units important for conservation nearby including Elk Knob State Park in Watauga and Ashe counties, Mountain Bogs State Natural Area in Avery County and newly authorized state natural areas at Yellow Mountain (on the Mitchell-Avery line) and Bear Paw just north of the Town of Seven Devils.

RESERVATIONS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

that will not only help our visitors get more enjoyment from the state parks, but help the parks and their rangers manage ever-growing visitation," said Lewis Ledford, director of the state parks system.

The system had a record 13.4 million visitors in 2007.

Infospherix, a Clarksburg, Md.-based company formerly known as Reserve-World, has a contract in place to develop and manage the system. Infospherix operates similar system in several states including Maryland, Michigan, Georgia and Ohio and operates duplicate toll-free call centers in Maryland and Indiana.

Once the system is in place, visitors can visit a Web site intertwined with the parks system's existing site, view available campsites and pay for a reservation. There will be a \$3 surcharge per reservation or night's stay for the service.

Staff at the state parks will also be able to make reservations for walk-in visitors. People can also make reservations by phone via an 800 number.

Some campsites will be left for walk-up registration.

The system will be rolled out to the public in April for reservations in August and thereafter.

Only a few parks now allow reservations and those are generally limited to week-long stays. Many regular visitors make those reservations for favored vacation campsites and picnic shelters in early January.

That option will still be available in 2009 and those reservations will be entered into the new system before it's brought online.

The division began investigating a reservations system in 2001, but a state budget crisis that year swallowed a

modest grant to get the project started. In 2006, division staff began preparing a request for bids in earnest.

In the interim, companies such as Infospherix refined such reservations systems and became more adept at spotting and correcting potential problems before projects were launched.

Groundwork for the division staff has included the inventory of all campsites and other facilities that can be reserved. Not only the location, but the amenities of each campsite are being noted.

And, the staff is refining a long set of business rules such as reservations deadlines, refund policies and length-of-stay limits.

Another benefit of the reservations system will be a flow of information back to the division about visitor demographics and preferences.

10 NEW RANGERS SWORN INTO SERVICE

Ten rangers were sworn into service Sept. 12 and also became “some of the best front-line ambassadors for North Carolina, according to Superior Court Judge Paul G. Gessner, who officiated at the ceremony.

Before swearing in the rangers as law enforcement officers, Gessner, who has been a Raleigh police officer and a prosecuting attorney, said rangers and the state parks where they serve definitely improve the quality of life in the state.

Gessner said he’s worked alongside his sons at William B. Umstead State Park on scouting projects. “One of the great things about North Carolina is that I can go back to the parks and do with them a lot of the things my parents did with me,” he said.



Receiving a commission as Special Peace Officer at the end of 17-week basic law enforcement training is generally regarded as the last formal step before a ranger takes on full duties in a unit of the state parks system.

During the training



NEW RANGERS TAKE THE OATH FROM JUDGE PAUL G. GESSNER.

period prior to commissioning, a ranger is assimilated into the park and begins assuming duties in resource management and visitor service.

Lewis Ledford, state parks director, told the rangers that they should be able to communicate the system’s mission.

“These properties and the record 13 million people who came to the parks last year, these resources and those people are entrusted in your care,” Ledford said. “Know that you are about service and know that you are about stewardship.”

Greg Schneider, chief of operations, said that wisdom, compassion and courage were held up by the philosopher Confucius as admirable traits.

“These are the attributes I’d like our park rangers to emulate.”

The rangers who were commissioned are: Amy Kristin Bernhardt, Lake Waccamaw State Park; Nicole Leigh Crider, Medoc Mountain State Park; Anthony Gene DeSantis, Dismal Swamp State Park; David Jonathan LaPlante, South Mountains State Park; Steve Lee McMurray, Jordan Lake State Recreation Area; Torry James Nergart, Haw River State Park; John Thomas Privette, Lumber River State Park; Jonathan Richard Short, Lake Waccamaw State Park; Jacob Michael Vitak, Fort Fisher State Recreation Area; Ann Helene Wunderly, Jockey’s Ridge State Park.

SURVEY ASKS ABOUT FIVE-YEAR PARK PRIORITIES

For the first time, the state parks system is using results from an online survey as part of its efforts to gauge visitor priorities for a new system-wide plan.

The survey was posted on the state parks Web site in October and November asking North Carolinians what types of outdoor recreation facilities they would most enjoy as existing

and new state parks are developed over the next five years.

The 1987 State Parks Act requires five-year plans for the state parks system to efficiently meet its mission of outdoor recreation, conservation and environmental education and to spot trends in the use of state parks.

The survey asks participants about the types of camp-

grounds, trails and boating and recreation amenities they would most often use and seeks opinions about priorities.

With five new state parks under development through the system’s New Parks for a New Century initiative, the survey results are important to augment public meetings and the master planning process for new parks.

BRIGNER WILL LEAD RAVEN ROCK

Kristen Brigner, a senior ranger at Goose Creek State Park, has been promoted to superintendent of Raven Rock State Park in Harnett County. Brigner succeeds Paul Hart who retired earlier this year.

A superintendent is the chief of operations and administration at a state park or state recreation area with wide-ranging responsibilities for staffing, training, law enforcement, visitor services, natural resource protection and environmental education.

Brigner grew up near Spring Lake in Cumberland County and graduated from the University of North Carolina-Wilmington in 2004 with a

bachelor's degree in parks and recreation management. She worked as a seasonal employee at both Carolina Beach State Park and Falls Lake State Recreation Area.

Brigner joined the state parks system fulltime in 2005 as a ranger at William B. Umstead State Park and transferred to Goose Creek State Park in January to work as lead law enforcement and interpretive ranger.

She is a certified environmental educator and holds intermediate law enforcement certification.



"Kristen has wide-ranging experience as a ranger and is quite familiar with the area as well. That will serve her and the division well considering Raven Rock State Park's development, which will soon include a new visitor center," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director.

Brigner said, "I'm just looking forward to continuing to learn here at Raven Rock and continuing my success with the division, and hope I can contribute motivation, energy and drive to the park and its staff."

Raven Rock State Park was established in 1969 and now encompasses 4,694 acres. It recorded 100,426 visits in 2007.

LEQUIRE SUPERINTENDENT AT PETTIGREW

Doug Lequire, a senior ranger at Pettigrew State Park in Washington and Tyrrell counties, has been promoted to superintendent of that park. He succeeds Sid Shearin who retired earlier this year.

A superintendent is the chief of operations and administration at a state park or state recreation area with wide-ranging responsibilities for staffing, training, law enforcement, visitor services, natural resource protection and environmental education.

A native of Salisbury, Lequire graduated from the

University of North Carolina-Charlotte in 2001 with bachelor's degrees in biology and chemistry and served five years with the U.S.

Air Force. He joined the staff at Pettigrew State Park as a seasonal employee in 2005 and was later hired as a fulltime ranger.

He is a certified environmental educator.

"Pettigrew State Park has experienced significant growth with acquisitions along



the Scuppernong River where visitor facilities will eventually be developed. Doug has the skills and energy to lead the park through this period of change," said Lewis Ledford, director of the state parks system.

Lequire said, "This park has many recreational and cultural resources. I feel privileged to have an opportunity to be part of the many new and exciting improvements that are in the future for the park."

Pettigrew State Park was established in 1939 and now encompasses 4,154 acres. It recorded 66,551 visits in 2007.

DISMAL SWAMP CANAL TRAIL GETS DESIGNATION

The Dismal Swamp Canal Trail in Camden County has been designated one of 24 trails in 16 states to be a National Recreation Trail. The trail skirts the boundary of Dismal Swamp State Park.

The announcement was made by Secretary of the Interior Dick Kempthorne as part of the 40th anniversary of the National Trails System.

The concept of a multi-use trail running parallel with

U.S. 17 and the Dismal Swamp Canal from South Mills to the North Carolina/Virginia border was developed in 1998, and it opened to the public in 2005 with financial support from North Carolina DOT.

CONSTRUCTION SCRAPS HEAD FOR REEF

The coastal education and visitor center being built at Fort Macon State Park is designed to be a “green” building, but it’s already helping the coastal environment in an unexpected way.

After spotting tons of concrete scraps – cutoff pieces of foundation pilings – piling up at the construction site, Ranger John Fullwood contacted the Division of Marine Fisheries. Could the concrete be used to help build one of

the division’s artificial reefs, he asked.

Jim Francesconi, artificial reef coordinator, came to the state park, eyed the material and agreed that it’d be a shame to waste all that lovely concrete.

He arranged with subcontractor Hatchell Concrete of Manteo to have the material delivered to the division’s staging site for the vessel West Bay in South River.

A total of 1,112 feet of

12” x 12” concrete pilings was delivered. Ranging in length from two to 12 feet, the material weighed a total 83.4 tons. It will all become part of Atlantic Beach Reef AR-315, located near Fort Macon.

The reef provides habitat for fish and a target for hopeful fishermen.

At added benefit is that Hatchell Concrete didn’t use as much fuel and time to haul the material 200 miles back to Manteo.

STATE PARKS AT THE STATE FAIR



SEAN HIGGINS, LEFT, OF THE INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION PROGRAM AND RANGER AUSTIN PAUL HELP VISITORS AT A FISHING POND WHERE THE ‘CATCH’ OFFERS INFORMATION ABOUT DIFFERENT STATE PARKS. BELOW, THE SUSTAINABLE CAMPSITE THE STATE PARKS SYSTEM MAINTAINED DURING THE FAIR INCLUDED A TENT EMBLAZONED WITH A MAP OF ALL THE PARKS.

*PHOTOS BY
DENISE
WILLIAMS*



*PRIMITIVE CAMPSITES ON BEAR
ISLAND OFFER AN UNCLUTTERED
VIEW OF SAND AND SKY.*

THE BEACH - UNPLUGGED

By CHARLIE PEEK



This bird is hovering like a kite and shrieking like a fishwife about eight feet from my boat.

The oystercatcher is more than curious; it's irritated at my being here, likely a sentinel for a group of its fellows squatting on mudbank just a few yards away. There's quite a collection of shore birds sharing the exposed bank and watching the boat traffic.

Along with my gear, I'm stuffed into a 13-foot kayak and cruising to Bear Island at Hammocks Beach State Park. The mission is to paddle the two-mile kayak trail to the island's eastern point and stake out a primitive campsite for the night.

This type of no-frills (okay, a few frills) camping is becoming more popular in the state parks as more visitors seek near-total immersion in nature. It might have something to do with the popularity of *Survivor* and like-minded TV shows.

There is no breeze in the mid-morning sun, and the water is polished marble. The park's treasured three-mile-long barrier island is a smudge on a pencil-line horizon. The outbound

paddle normally takes about an hour unless tides and wind are cruel. I'm soaking up the summer morning, so it takes me a lot longer.

Dugout canoes of American Indians once made similar trips, and perhaps the longboats of buccaneers, evidenced by the remains of colonial forts in the area that helped protect against raiders.

Later, cattle were driven across the marshes at low tide by farmers who left them on the island to graze. Nobody's sure how the island got its name, though some suspect it originally may have been called "bare" island. There are just a few acres of maritime forest disrupting the dune fields.

Most visitors take the park's ferries, which run continuously on summer days and on weekends in the spring and fall. It's a short, comfortable ride, but they miss the rare experience of cruising low and quiet through the marsh grass like an alligator.

I slowly sweep the island's eastern headland and into a narrow and twisting channel leading into a lagoon and to a kayak landing spot on the island's backside. The falling tide that had paraded me so handsomely through the marshes is now an adversary.

Just a few minutes on the marsh teach that tide, wind and shallow water matter very much, and why the old salts took such careful notes about all this.

At times, a tide race barely eight feet wide creates a current as strong as a mountain stream. This and very shallow areas at times make it easier to wade and tow the kayak. This is not unpleasant traveling. The water is refreshing like a high-elevation stream, but oddly silent.

The lagoon -- maybe 50 acres at high tide -- is a destination in itself. It's ringed by high

CONTINUED ON PAGE 13



SUNSET IS QUIET TIME AT AN ISLAND CAMPSITE.



LEFT, PADDLERS CRUISE THE NARROW CHANNEL INTO THE LAGOON BEHIND BEAR ISLAND. BELOW, AN EGRET PERCHED IN THE MARSH BETWEEN THE MAINLAND AND THE ISLAND WATCHES FOR A MEAL.

dunes, quiet, private and soothing. A small break in the marsh grass allows boats to be dragged on shore.

The simple campsites are plainly marked, easy to find but not easy to get to. About 150 yards of deep sand lie between me and my site, and the gear requires four trips. Now's the time for hindsight about how much stuff to bring on this trip.

The welcome news is that the site is nestled among the seriously high dunes of the island, sheltering it from storms and unusual tides. The less welcome news is that the site is nestled among the dunes where the summer sea breeze is reluctant to go.

Setting up a tent is warm work. Campfires aren't allowed, and that doesn't inconvenience me a bit right now.

And, there is a lot of hot sand. I'm grateful for the picnic table – the only manmade structure at the primitive campsite – that allows for relatively sand-free coffee.

On the beach a few hundred yards away, through a haze of sea spray, I can make out the knot of daytime park visitors clustered in front of the island's bathhouse and its network of boardwalks and picnic gazebos.

A fair number of these visitors eventually make their way down the beach alone or in pairs collecting shells. The island's specialty seems to be sand dollars though the gentler summer breakers don't deliver very many.

Just east of the string of 10 beachfront campsites, the strollers usually are turned back by an intimidating expanse of flat, barren sand that opens onto Bogue Inlet. Some areas are off limits as habitat for nesting shore birds, who consider this hardscrabble flat of sand the perfect home site.

A late afternoon cruise is a joy. About the hour that the last ferry leaves with its cargo of tired visitors, the afternoon light pushes the marsh grass to a fluorescent green, punctuated by the sheer white egrets.



The breeze freshens, and I can vaguely feel the sudden absence of people. There is only a handful of weekday campers left sharing what, in this moment, feels like my island.

Preparation for sunset includes hot coffee, proper placement of a camp chair and a Jimmy Buffet mindset. The event doesn't disappoint.

The sun turns intensely orange, hangs for a few moments and drops behind the dunes and their shaggy manes of sea oats.

Across Bogue Inlet in the twilight, I can still see the beach of gooney golf and deep fried restaurants. Certainly God has nothing against hushpuppies, but here on Bear Island seems to be the beach as he intended.

Want to try it? Permits are required for campers (and their cars if left at the park) for \$9/day. No reservations until mid-2009. Campers can kayak/canoe to Bear Island or backpack gear via the ferry, but no carts are allowed on the ferry for hauling gear. A kayak/canoe cart is available at the visitor center to help get your craft onto the launch dock. Water and cold, outdoor showers are available at the bathhouse. Campsites are open year round, but water is shut off during the winter. No campfires, and campers must remove all trash. Six people are allowed on each site with up to two tents. There are two excellent boat-in sites on the eastern headland (at the entrance to the channel into the lagoon), but the bathhouse is not easily accessible from those.

TNC PRESERVES 357-ACRE GORGE TRACT

The Nature Conservancy will buy a 357-acre tract on the flank of Rumbling Bald Mountain in Rutherford County, provided \$2.5 million in private funds can be found to match a \$3.5 million grant from the Clean Water Management Trust Fund.

It's likely that the property on the mountain's flank will eventually be part of Chimney Rock State Park.

Known as the King tract, the property provides a buffer between the Rumbling Bald ridge along the north side of Hickory Nut Gorge and developed property to the north and east.

"The Clean Water Management Trust Fund Board of Directors recognizes that this is a very special place," said Richard Rogers, executive director of the fund. "Preserving this tract continues our commitment to protecting the Broad River basin."

Montane oak-hickory forest covers much of the tract, along with acidic cove forest and chestnut oak forest and species found there include the rare lampshade spider, the green salamander and eastern woodrat.

The trust fund has invested \$12.1 million in Hickory Nut Gorge, including \$1.5 million toward the purchase of the former Chimney Rock Park as part of the greater state park.

About 4,000 acres have been set aside for the state park, however, the only current public access is at Chimney Rock, the former 1,000-acre tourist destination.

The acquisition of the King tract and other properties is part of a far-reaching conservation



VIEW OF HICKORY NUT GORGE FROM A PORTION OF RUMBLING BALD MOUNTAIN.

strategy in the gorge and or the development of the state park.

The Nature Conservancy, along with its partners – Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina and the Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy --- is working to acquire additional property that could be transferred to the state parks system.

Don Reuter, assistant director of the state parks system, praised efforts to preserve Hickory Nut Gorge property. "The Clean Water Management Trust Fund, The Nature Conservancy and other conservancies are incredible partners in our efforts to build a world-class state park," he said. "When it is complete, Chimney Rock State park will be a crown jewel in our system."

CAROLINA BEACH BEGINS MARINA PROJECT

Carolina Beach State Park will begin a \$2.5 million project to renovate its marina and boat access area and dredge the marina basin and access channel in November.

Boat-owners renting the marina's 42 slips were asked to remove their craft in mid-November.

"We know these repairs and improvements will mean some inconvenience for our tenants and other park visitors during construction and we'll try to minimize that as much as possible," Park Superintendent Terri Taylor said "But, the end result will be a much improved facility and safer boating access.

Construction is expected to continue through the summer of 2009.

The project was funded in late 2007 through the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund. As designed, the project includes replacement of bulkheads, floating docks, a fixed walkway system and underground fuel tanks, improvements to the facility's two boat ramps, a redesigned parking area and the addition of boat slips.

The marina was built in 1990. The basin and channel were last dredged in 1999.

During the initial phase of the project, the marina building and its store will remain open for campers and other park visitors, and the parking area will be available for access to trails and a fishing deck.

NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS

MONTHLY ATTENDANCE REPORT

AUGUST, 2008

NC STATE PARK	August 2008	TOTAL YTD Aug-08	August 2007	TOTAL YTD Aug-07	% CHANGE (2008/2007) Aug YTD	
Carolina Beach	58,956	334,274	45,044	369,794	31%	-10%
Chimney Rock	28,763	150,400	0	0	-100%	-100%
Cliffs of the Neuse	13,769	96,772	13,744	100,936	0%	-4%
Crowders Mountain	27,503	241,036	28,510	266,697	-4%	-10%
Dismal Swamp	3,357	19,556	0	0	-100%	-100%
Elk Knob	1,088	3,240	0	0	-100%	-100%
Eno River including Occoneechee Mountain	43,477	290,879	36,077	280,867	21%	4%
Falls Lake	86,901	633,995	93,753	735,499	-7%	-14%
Fort Fisher	108,215	555,778	94,560	668,624	14%	-17%
Fort Macon	173,152	890,174	158,256	898,014	9%	-1%
Goose Creek	20,249	126,730	17,240	121,260	17%	5%
Gorges	1,002	14,165	20,403	101,367	-95%	-86%
Hammocks Beach	16,965	94,170	15,243	85,521	11%	10%
Haw River	2,464	17,140	2,193	12,887	12%	33%
Hanging Rock	61,830	320,105	52,446	340,888	18%	-6%
Jones Lake	3,078	58,478	7,211	56,037	-57%	4%
Jordan Lake	96,941	641,026	132,257	1,006,801	-27%	-36%
Jockey's Ridge	288,095	1,100,450	229,603	1,215,154	25%	-9%
Kerr Lake	161,236	936,076	169,760	906,364	-5%	3%
Lake James	49,832	286,166	51,079	291,641	-2%	-2%
Lake Norman	50,673	362,133	55,506	351,852	-9%	3%
Lake Waccamaw	2,207	36,419	11,706	71,833	-81%	-49%
Lumber River	7,416	57,596	7,728	60,160	-4%	-4%
Merchants Millpond	21,252	156,969	11,460	94,937	85%	65%
Medoc Mountain	5,432	39,001	5,532	38,347	-2%	2%
Mount Mitchell	31,150	108,506	48,134	199,431	-35%	-46%
Morrow Mountain	45,272	270,360	36,380	277,860	24%	-3%
New River including Mount Jefferson	39,178	180,052	40,311	205,214	-3%	-12%
Pettigrew	1,187	44,506	6,828	43,056	-83%	3%
Pilot Mountain	35,500	245,624	33,684	264,663	5%	-7%
Raven Rock	12,053	80,604	5,694	65,416	112%	23%
Singletary Lake	3,596	24,392	3,552	22,477	1%	9%
South Mountains	19,312	129,356	17,255	148,289	12%	-13%
Stone Mountain	26,772	249,064	47,716	326,554	-44%	-24%
Weymouth Woods	3,758	34,687	4,014	33,488	-6%	4%
William B. Umstead	56,045	444,456	56,301	428,910	-0%	4%
SYSTEMWIDE TOTAL	1,607,676	9,274,335	1,559,180	10,090,838	3%	-8%



Our Mission Remains...

to protect North Carolina's **natural diversity**;
to provide and promote **outdoor recreation**
opportunities throughout North Carolina;
to exemplify and encourage **good stewardship**
of North Carolina's natural resources for all
citizens and visitors.

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SAFETY ZONE

CHILDPROOF YOUR LIVING AREA

✓Get down on a child's level
to see what dangers you see
from their perspective.

✓Make sure all cords are
secured to prevent tripping
and are positioned not to
encourage children to play
with them.

✓Place corner guards on
all sharp edges of furniture
to protect toddlers.

✓Child gates should be
placed at all stairways
to prevent children from
climbing up and down. Be
sure to use a child gate and
not a pet gate; there is a
difference.

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